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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how the researcher revised an action research class for preservice Masters students within the larger context of school improvement. Analysis of students' action research projects revealed some ironic and unintended consequences of linking action research to school improvement. Analysis of the researcher's own pedagogical efforts, teacher research texts, and school district policies shed light on the findings. This study was itself an action research project that mirrored data collection and analysis techniques many of the interns would use. This paper describes program and course information, student constructions of action research within the context of school improvement, and contexts for constructing action research. While students' action research projects had some value, the value was rarely for both the individual and the institution. Either students learned more about their pedagogical relationships with students and developed the reflective stance of an inside researcher, or they adopted the stance of a traditional outside researcher hired to evaluate a school program. (Contains 28 references.) (SM)

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Connecting Action Research and School Improvement: A Case of Ironic Consequences

by

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Paper prepared for presentation at the annual meetings of the Association of Teacher Educators, Chicago, February 1999 and the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, Washington DC, February 1999.

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Both teacher research and teacher-research courses vary considerably. This is quickly apparent after even a brief perusal of teacher research texts (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen, 1994; Hopkins, 1993), books of and about teacher research (Carr & Kemmis, 1988; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), descriptions of action research courses (Stevenson, Noffke, Flores & Granger, 1995; Zeichner & Gore, 1995), and action research products (*Teaching & Change, Teacher Research, Educational Action Research).* Given the rich history of teacher research, as well as the multiple and often conflicting goals for education and educational change, these variations should come as no surprise. Some versions of teacher research emphasize individual and personal aspects of action research: self-knowledge, fulfillment, and deeper understanding of one's own practice. Some stress collaborative and professional aspects: the engagement of teachers in contextualized knowledge generation and school change. And some recall the social activist, political roots of action research, promoting democratic forms of schooling. But as Noffke (1997) concludes from a comprehensive historical review, "the professional as well as the personal dimensions of action research are distinct from the political only if they are constructed that way" (p. 331). All three dimensions have both liberating and limiting potential. Action research can promote the inclusion of teacher and community voice in the generation of professional knowledge, create personally satisfying and collegial work environments, and mobilize action around a social justice agenda. Or it can be used as a bureaucratic instrument of staff development, reinforce the individualistic norms of the profession, become a burdensome mandate that further intensifies the work of teaching, or deteriorate into intellectualized theory with little liberatory action.

With this framework and these cautions in mind, I set about revising an action research class I taught to preservice masters students. Reflecting on previous classes and current research, I believed I was short-changing the more collaborative, professional dimension of action research (AR) and decided to more explicitly emphasize its links to professional development (PD), and school improvement (SI). While I re-learned some inevitable lessons (e.g., teaching, curriculum transformation, teacher reflection and school reform pose hard intellectual and institutional challenges), I also learned a new, unexpected lesson: Students in the class were unable to engage in

research that simultaneously functioned as personal, professional development and supported school improvement efforts. Those who chose to study a school-wide issue paid almost no attention to their own practice of teaching; those who focused on their own teaching practice had difficulty connecting to school improvement.

In retrospect, that result could be seen as inevitable. Readers might say that any experienced staff developer or research instructor should realize that different types of researchable questions require different units of analysis and types of action. But the growing rhetoric about the closely intertwined relationship between professional development and school improvement suggests otherwise. The literature offers few hints that focusing on school improvement can actually detract from studying one's own teaching. Apart from the cautions about bureaucratic control, the goal of linking action research to school improvement can sound deceptively simple and reciprocal:

> The exciting aspect of action research as a professional development model for schoolwide reform is that. . . .[i]t doesn't take long before action research spreads from a classroom through the building, crossing grade levels, disciplines, and student populations. While action research takes place at the classroom level, its use as a professional development model can serve as a catalyst for schoolwide reform (Sutton, Dean, Henry & Krueger, 1997).

Although this quote was shared by one of the interns on the last day of class to illustrate her experience, it was far from the dominant experience. An analysis of students' action research projects reveals some ironic and unintended consequences of linking action research to school improvement. A corresponding analysis of my own pedagogical efforts, teacher research texts, and school district policies sheds light on those findings.

Theoretical Framework

My pedagogical interest in the professional dimension of AR begs the question implied in the introductory paragraphs: "Why is linking action research, professional development and school improvement even necessary?" Isn't it enough to treat action research as a way for teachers to become more reflective and analytic about their classroom teaching? But this response is based on an old and limiting image of teaching, one that Lortie (1975) vividly captured with the metaphor

"egg crate" school, in which each teacher spends her or his day isolated from other adults with minimal interdependence of effort. Yet this was the image of teaching that, by default, I was reproducing in my own construction of action research. Although I used the AR class to give students collaborative support and feedback, encouraged the interns to work with other teachers, and forefronted the emancipatory tradition of AR, the students' main work was still solitary, an individual project to improve one's own teaching.

While this is a worthy goal, I was becoming dissatisfied with its limitations. My interests and concerns about teaching were increasingly related to school-level change. As Lieberman and Miller (1994) argued:

> While we support teacher research as a major reform strategy, we do so with caution. For we believe that teacher research cannot stand alone as an innovation, that it must be explicitly linked to organizational conditions that support the transformation of schools. As a solitary innovation, teacher research has a poor chance for survival. As part of a systemic approach to school reform, it may well fulfill its promise. (p. 204)

So I attempted to make more explicit the connections among the students' action research projects, their on-going professional development as teachers, and school improvement efforts. I thought that by helping students consider action research in relation to school improvement at the beginning of their teaching careers, and by giving them research skills and intellectual tools to make those links, that the potential of action research improving their lives as teachers and transforming school culture would be increased. My reasoning went something like this:

The claim has often been made about the "symbiotic" relationship between school improvement and professional development. Although schools and school systems still under-invest in professional development, the importance of providing classroom teachers continuous opportunities to learn is widely acknowledged. Much of this new emphasis is driven by the belief that past models of professional development have been weak, ineffective interventions (Hawley & Valli, 1999); more challenging standards for ALL children require new forms of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1996); the quality of teaching is more important to student learning than any other school factor (Hawley & Rosenholtz, 1984); and any significant school change efforts rely on new

teacher knowledge, beliefs and practices (Elmore, Peterson & McCarthey, 1996; Fullan, 1991). The argument that school improvement cannot occur without collaborative, school-embedded professional development is based on the following premises:

(a) the aim of school improvement should be student learning
(b) student learning is intimately connected with teacher learning
(c) teaching is so complex, with expectations for teachers increasingly raised, that teachers must have the opportunities to continuously learn
(d) this learning is dependent on professional development opportunities
(e) these opportunities are more powerful when they are shared and linked to shared goals and mission.

As Sarason (1990) concluded from a career-long investigation of school culture, "It is virtually impossible to create and sustain over time conditions for productive learning for students when they do not exist for teachers" (p. 145). Even those who caution against institutionalizing action research as a way to attain goals set by administrators believe that teacher research projects must "become more of a consistent, collaborative means for professional and school development" (Burnaford, 1996, p. 141).

For these reasons, I thought that reframing the action research course within the larger context of school improvement was worth the effort. Unlike most student teachers, the students in this class were more integrated into the life of the school than most prospective teachers. Hired as full time instructional assistants (IAs), they would have more vested interest in the school, more responsibility, greater access to information, and be more likely to participate in school-wide initiatives. Their dual role (student teacher and IA), gave me the incentive to make these pedagogical changes. I decided that even if not all of the students were able to carry out action research projects directly connected to school improvement plans, that simply conceptualizing the connections and hearing about others' school-wide projects would be of value.

Research Methodology

In many ways, my study of this course was an action research project that mirrored data collection and analysis techniques many of the interns would use. I audiotaped the classes and typed up summaries of each tape as soon as possible. This enabled me to keep a running record of

the enacted as well as the intended (planned) curriculum. From these summaries I could obtain verbatim transcriptions. I also kept a reflective journal and occasionally had discussion sessions with two other teacher educators, who were similarly studying their own practice. I constructed questionnaires and course assignments that would serve both a pedagogical purpose (enabling the interns to think about connections between action research and school improvement) and a data collection purpose (letting me see what kinds of connections students were making and what issues might surface). My syllabus and course assignments, their written responses, school improvement plans, and state and school district guidelines became the research artifacts. I made copies of all relevant materials (including my comments) before giving them back to students. In that way, I was able to maintain a relatively complete and permanent record of unfolding events. I also taped private interviews with four students who conducted a school-level project and two students who studied a classroom-level project because their issues were particularly salient to my research interests.

In the proposal I submitted for human subject clearance, I described my research purpose as "understanding my role as a teacher in helping teacher candidates develop and pursue action research agendas around their own teaching. In particular, I am interested in how I go about promoting understandings of action research, teaching, and the interconnections among action research, teaching, and school improvement initiatives." One of the primary research questions listed was: "Can this course become more directly linked to school improvement while retaining a focus on the professional development needs of beginning teachers?"

The methodology followed the guidelines submitted in the proposal:

> The study will be conducted in the context of regular classroom events. I will take detailed field notes of class sessions, where I will focus on the processes and content of classroom discussions and activities and my own role in these activities. In order to facilitate the process of collecting and analyzing data around classroom conversations, I plan to audiotape class sessions. In addition, I will ask each participant to complete brief questionnaires about their understandings of action research and teaching. The questionnaire will be administered at the beginning and at the end of the semester. No student will be required to participate in any activity or assignment beyond normal course expectations. Each student will designate types of possible involvement (e.g. agreeing to

> semi-structured taped interviews, allowing their words to be paraphrased or quoted, participating in a case study). In no way will participation or non-participation in this study affect or influence grades. . . .Participants in the study are free to discontinue their involvement at any time without facing any negative consequences.

All the students agreed to levels of participation beyond permitting an audiotaped, naturalistic inquiry into my own teaching. Thirteen of the fifteen agreed to my using direct quotations from their written assignments, classroom participation, and taped interviews. One student was concerned about responding to my questions about school improvement efforts. When I assured her that pseudonyms would be used and that I would get her approval on any writing I did about her school, she agreed to the interview. Several months after the course ended, I asked a doctoral student, who enrolled in the course but was not part of the study, for feedback on a draft of this manuscript. I particularly wanted to know if the tone and themes had face validity. He confirmed that my characterization of the course was consistent with his recollections from class meetings and conversations with other students.

In summary, the techniques used for data gathering in this study were those standard for fieldwork: participant observation, key informant interviewing, and document review (Pitman & Maxwell, 1992). I supplemented these data sources with surveys and written assignments. In grounded-theory fashion, data collection and analysis were an interactive process (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). During and after each class I reflected on what I was learning and kept notes about important topics, themes and issues as they related to my research interest. As Erickson has noted about this type of research, "induction and deduction are in constant dialogue" (1986, p. 121). Although I began the study within the "deductive" frame of connections among action research, professional development and school improvement, I did not know what the nature of those connections would be or what issues I would decide were most critical to address. I began the writing process descriptively and linearly, laying out "what happened" in the class. I reviewed and summarized each data source in order to render "thick descriptions" of events and to see patterns more clearly. It was during this data analysis and narrative writing phase that I began to formulate

"the story" I wanted to tell with the data. That necessarily meant focusing more narrowly on key sources and deliberately looking for patterns that confirmed or disconfirmed the narrative.

Program and Course Information

With this research agenda in mind, I prepared to teach the Action Research course. These preservice masters degree students, who in age from the mid-twenties to mid-forties, were in their last semester of a two year program. Many had worked in the school system prior to entering the program. This was in marked contrast to most teacher education models, in which students are generally younger and less experienced, their role briefer and more limited, and they are not an employee of the school system.

As indicated in the introduction, I had, in the past, approached the course primarily as a personal, practical development experience for students, trying to give them tools to systematically study their own practice and make improvements based on "evidence." While encouraging them to work with their cooperating teachers, or others, I did little to help them systematically think about connections between professional development and school improvement. We merely read and discussed their textbook chapter on school improvement toward the end of the semester (Hopkins, 1993). Even though Hopkins weaves the theme of school improvement throughout the text, my classnotes indicate that I did not emphasize it. In fact, I was probably not even aware of it until I undertook this study. This year, I wanted to explicitly interweave the connection between school improvement and action research as a type of professional development throughout the course. I intended to use school improvement plans as the mechanism to focus on school improvement in order to provide something concrete and consistent across sites. The school system had established common goals for all schools and a framework to report yearly plans to meet goals. I believed that this framework was broad and inclusive enough for students to see how their action research projects related to these goals. I also extrapolated that if their projects related to the goals, they would also relate to school improvement efforts. This turned out to be an unwarranted leap of faith.

In concrete terms, I made three types of course changes in order to put more emphasis on the professional, collaborative, and school improvement aspects of action research; I revised assignments, added new assignments, and reframed class discussions. I was not successful in finding new books or articles that supported my orientation to the course, but did find that one of the cooperating teachers, Ms. Upton, was an active, avid action researcher and invited her to speak to the class. Throughout the semester I engaged students in in-class activities and gave homework assignments that had them think about different aspects of formal school improvement plans or informal school initiatives. I also brought up the issue in interviews and in informal conversations with students about their projects and in comments on their papers.

As the course developed I realized that the link between action research and school improvement could be developed in two ways: the first would be actual engagement in action research, the second would be exploring the conceptual link between the two. I worked on both of these simultaneously. While only some of the students selected a school-level project that was explicitly related to the school improvement plan, all had the benefit of hearing about these projects in class discussions and presentations and all participated in readings, discussions and activities that explored the action research/school improvement connection.

In preparing to teach the course, I had students send me a copy of their SIP so we could use them as context for their AR projects. I then spent some time reviewing these plans and rewrote the course syllabus and guidelines for AR assignments. The course overview for the syllabus continued to define AR as a form of educational praxis in which knowledge and action are closely interwoven and mutually inform one another. However, I expanded the purpose of the course to include SI (noted by italics): "the purpose of this course is to promote the concept of teachers as researchers: those who inquire into their own practice and who make curricular, teaching, and *school improvement* decisions based on what they learn." Similar phrases were deliberately retained or added to the lists of course assumptions:

•inquiry can improve teaching and schooling as well as teacher professionalism and

satisfaction

•collaborative inquiry can have more impact than individual inquiry

•improving teaching and schooling is a value-laden and often controversial process

•*action research can be a powerful form of professional development and school improvement*

and to course expectations:

•design and conduct research on some aspect of your *classroom*, teaching *and/or school improvement*; this involves becoming more insightful observers of classroom and *school* phenomenon

•see yourself as part of a larger community of educators who make informed decisions and continuously learn through praxis.

I was also explicit about my own research and school improvement interest:

> Because I believe that action research should foster teachers' *professional development and school improvement*, I am interested in exploring the possibilities of connecting action research projects more explicitly to *school improvement efforts* underway in each of your schools. In some ways, this is my own action research project. I will not, however, subordinate your own professional development needs and interests to a specific school improvement plan. Rather, we will explore, in general, what the connections might be and how each of you might contribute to a caring, just, and intellectually motivating school environment.

With this statement, I hoped to lay the basis for conceptually linking AR, PD and SI, as well as encouraging them to undertake AR that was, in actual practice, closely aligned with collaborative change efforts underway in their schools. I also intended to signal that I would not privilege my own research interests over theirs.

The pedagogical challenge in re-visioning this course was to incorporate yet another dimension of action research without it becoming artificial, extraneous and overwhelming. Within a one semester time frame, I was already attempting to teach (a) the meaning(s) of action/teacher research in relation to "traditional" forms of research, (b) types of questions that teacher researchers might ask, (c) the tools and techniques for doing AR, (d) ways of interrogating/critiquing common assumptions and modes of teaching practice, (e) emancipatory aspects of AR, (f) how to review and use related research and theory, (g) how to negotiate their research interests within their school

contexts, and (h) how to actually conduct the research and write a research report. I also wanted to retain opportunities for them to hear about and offer advise on each others' work in order to model professional discourse and collaborative learning communities. Within this already full syllabus, I wanted to make the AR, PD, SI connections more central. This could happen in a variety of forms: emphasizing collaborative possibilities, seeing AR as a mode of professional development and a vehicle for school improvement, and attending more to school initiatives and data collection efforts. My thinking about how to accomplished all these goals developed as the course progressed.

I retained the four written assignments designed to structure the research process. The first was a description of and rationale for their research question; the second, an explanation of the fit between the research question and methodology; the third a description of data analysis procedures; and the fourth, the in-depth, comprehensive product. Guidelines for these papers were revised to include connections to school improvement plans, reflection on personal, professional and political aspects of their research, and an explanation of how the project was important to the school. I also developed new in-class and out-of-class activities to strengthen AR, PD and SI connections. The assignments were designed to prompt certain ways of thinking about teaching and action research: How teachers, classrooms and school environments all have independent but inter-related influences on student thinking; how action research projects can have different purposes, goals, questions and foci for change; and how data collection and analysis for action research and school improvement plans are similar.

Student Constructions of Action Research

What difference did my emphasis on school improvement make in student constructions of action research? Did I see any difference from past cohorts? Were students able to retain a focus on their professional growth needs when they attended to school improvement issues?

I had taught the AR class to the two previous cohorts in this program. Out of a total of 33 students, only three had selected a school-wide focus. Most had studied their own classroom practice, or the practice of other classroom teachers in order to inform their own. This year, five of

the 15 students selected a school-wide focus and two, placed in the same school, collaborated on a project (See Table I). Although students in past cohorts had observed one another, helped one another with videotaping and so forth, none had developed a collaborative project. In addition to class conversations that emphasized school-wide issues and improvement initiatives, the group was constructing ways in which action research could be collaborative and linked to school improvement efforts. My pedagogical efforts seemed to be paying off. The school as a unit of analysis was more prominent in both individual projects and classroom discussions than it had been in previous years.

Table I: Unit of Analysis in Action Research Projects

Unit of Analysis	1994	1996	1998
Classroom	15	15	10
School	1	2	5*

*two students paired on a collaborative project

However, as I reflected on my field notes and other data sources, I began to realize that students were having difficulty making the connections among action research, professional development and school improvement that seemed so obvious to me in the planning stages of the course and that sound so self-evident in the literature. Indicators of these difficulties that are discussed in this section of the paper are: confusion over the definition and meaning of action research; focus on a single unit of analysis for AR; and differences in lessons that the interns learned.

Definition

The four areas of definitional confusion were whether AR had to (1) be quantitative, (2) effect change, (3) involve collaboration, and (4) focus on a specific object of change (e.g. self, students, classroom, school). These last two are most germane to the focus of this paper and were framed most directly in an email from Vanessa:

> I am confused about the following: Why, if action research is best done in pairs or with a group within the school, are we doing ours alone? Or are we supposed to be getting

> someone else involved at our schools? I am figuring that my coach's class (and maybe other classes) will be involved in my research, but not my coach. Is she supposed to be actively involved?. . . .Should our action research be geared toward changing and improving the teacher's style (as it seems to be saying in our textbook), or toward changing the students, as I think my focus is? (2/16/98)

My response, which I then reinforced for the whole class the following week, was:

> Vanessa, I've tried to encourage collaborative projects. Maybe I've been too subtle. I will try to emphasize this more on Wednesday. The more involvement you can get the better. But I didn't want anyone to be hampered by their inability to get others involved in a project they really wanted to do. One of my primary reasons for emphasizing school improvement initiatives is because I think collaborative action is so much more powerful than individual action. . . .The question of "who/what" am I researching/trying to change is very interesting. . . .I remember talking about three types of influence on students--the teacher, the classroom and the school. For me, action research can focus change on any of these. (2/17/98)

The message about collaboration also had been delivered by Ms. Upton, the guest speaker, the previous week. Although she found a strong spirit of collaboration in an Action Research Writing Group she was part of in England, Ms. Upton was rarely successful in inspiring collaborative action research projects in the States: "I kept trying hard to get people excited and involved in AR. At some schools it works better than others." Nonetheless, questions about the individual vs. collaborative nature of action research persisted. So did questions about the focus of change. I attended to these as they spontaneously arose in individual or group conversations by saying things like: Change can take place at a lot of different levels. I would just caution you to focus on what you can change--and that is often your own behavior and your own relationships to students.

I had not anticipated that trying to link AR to SI would create confusion over the meaning of AR. However, students raised questions about the nature of their projects often enough that I began to doubt my own understanding and explanations. I do not remember this happening in past years. After the third class meeting I wrote in my field notes:

> Perhaps my notion of AR is changing, or expanding, as I'm trying to link to SIPs. I do want them to be studying their own practices and assumptions (though I read somewhere that this focus makes them very vulnerable). Can they do this while studying school-wide programs? I think my bottom-line definition is that AR must involve (a) systematic collection and analysis of data that (b) leads to the possibility of improved practice. That

improvement can be at the individual teacher and/or school level. I'm aiming for both, but it could be one or the other. (2/ /98)

As the reader will see below, the "aiming for both" proved to be an unrealized fantasy.

Unit of Analysis

As shown in Table II, AR projects could be divided into two categories: those that studied the classroom as the unit of analysis and those that studied the school. I had no prior reason to assume that the dichotomy would occur or that it would be highly predictive of the type of link students made to the school improvement plan, to the research perspective they assumed, and to their ability to study their own practice. The following analysis indicates how the unit of analysis produced radically different forms of AR.

Table II: Comparison of School-Level and Classroom-Level Projects

Unit of Analysis	Direct SI Link	Collaborative	Insider Research	Self-Analysis
Classroom Level	0/10 (0%)	2/10 (20%)	10/10 (100%)	10/10 (100%)
School Level	4/4* (100%)	4/4 (100%)	2/4 (50%)	0/4 (0%)

*the number of projects at the school level

SIP Link: Students made connections to SI plans or initiatives in one of two ways. They either connected to only the broad statement of vision and goals that framed the SIP or they connected to specific school programs or initiatives. I was surprised by how completely the AR unit of analysis (classroom or school) determined the type of connection students made. Those who studied their own teaching in their own classrooms connected only at the goal or vision level. One could argue that vision statements are typically so broad that they can incorporate almost any action. That seemed to be the case here. Students said that focusing on topics such as math attitudes, homework completion, teacher questions, student engagement, self-regulated learning, writing rubrics and critical thinking could improve student learning (as measured by the state and district exams). Some also drew connections to a broad technology or community relations goal.

On the other hand, the five students whose projects took them out of the classroom to the school as the unit of analysis were able to go beyond this generalized connection to specific

programs and ways of assessing SI strategies. Leslie, for example, studied a new reading program for Gifted and Talented students that was directly mentioned in the school improvement plan. Standardized test scores indicated that only 5% of the schools G&T students passed the district test with distinction. The principal wanted to know what teachers thought of the new program and training they had received. Lisa agreed to do this evaluation for her AR project. Toni also studied an approach to reading instruction that was directly mentioned in her SIP: increasing IA support time to provide more individualized attention during direct reading instruction. Steve used his AR project as an opportunity to study a behavior management program he had helped develop for the sixty Learning Center students in his middle school (those designated as Level 5 learning disabled). Lana and George, whose instructional assistant positions were in the same school, developed and studied a curriculum implementation project on Character Education. The school district had recently mandated that all schools begin work on Character Education which, coincidentally, had been a long-standing interest of Lana's.

Collaboration: The classroom-level projects were also less frequently collaborative than were the school-level projects (20% vs. 100%). Only two of the ten interns who conducted classroom research worked closely with their mentors on their projects. One of these worked with two science teachers in looking at first graders' ability to handle the inquiry-oriented lessons they were constructing; the other worked with her mentor to understand better why so many first graders seemed to "tattle". The others worked mostly in isolation. Mentors offered support, but had little investment in the activity. They assumed the relatively passive roles of "sounding boards" or advisors. At lease one intern worked in a situation where there was tacit assent, but philosophical differences in the approach to the problem.

In contrast, all five students who worked on school-level topics participated in some form of collaboration with other members of the school community. Leslie's principal was excited about the opportunity to get teacher reactions to the value of training they had received and the new reading program they were implementing. She helped Leslie decide on a survey methodology and

obtain the cooperation of the teachers who would be interviewed. Steve, Toni, George and Lana all collaborated with a team of teachers to develop new programs in the school: behavior management, reading, and character education. However, even in these projects, the research component was not a collaborative activity. Although the other teachers received information about the research, they were not active participants in collecting or analyzing data. That responsibility was left with the interns as part of their program requirement. So even though having a school-level focus gave these five interns more collaborative opportunities than their counterparts who chose a classroom-level focus, the opportunities were still restricted primarily to program development rather than program evaluation or research.

Research Perspective: One of the distinguishing characteristics of teacher research is that it abolishes the traditional line between practitioners and researchers (check Cochran-Smith & Lytle). Those who conduct the research *are* the practitioners with a vested-interest in not merely understanding, but improving teaching, learning and schooling. I refer to this as an "insider" perspective: researching a practice, program or context in which one is actively engaged. All ten students whose classroom was the unit of analysis had this perspective. (add detail?).

The five school-level researchers, however, had a more difficult time assuming this perspective. Only George and Lana were true "insiders" studying their own curriculum development project. Toni's research role is one I would call "insider/outsider." She was actively engaged in teaching while conducting the research, but did not study her own practice. Although I encouraged her to tape her reading groups and/or gather information from students, she did not think she could handle the dual focus and was more interested in overall program effects. We agreed that that was what she would do. Her research methodology was strictly a statistical comparison of the standardized test scores of two modes of reading instruction.

Steve also had a dual "outsider/insider perspective, but in his case, the outsider role was even stronger than Toni's. Like Toni, Steve had helped design a program he was responsible for implementing. However, unlike Toni, he had completed the "full-time" teaching phase of his

internship before he collected his data. He did not study his own implementation of the program or the effects of the program on the behavior of students while he was teaching. Therefore, like Toni, he could be considered an "outsider" in that he was collecting data in other teachers' classrooms; yet an "insider" in having constructed and participated in the program.

Of the five students, Leslie assumed the most traditional "outsider" role. She was not teaching in the program, but the principal wanted to evaluate it and encouraged Leslie to take that on as her research project. Leslie described her research role as somewhat limiting "in that I was not one of the teachers who implemented the . . . program, but rather *an outside observer* intending to use the information I obtained in my own classroom at some later time." In my plans to link AR to SI, I had not anticipated the shift in research perspective that would ensue. Naively, I had assumed that all AR projects, regardless of unit of analysis, would be from an "insider" perspective.

Self-Analysis: There is a close correspondence between having an insider's perspective as a researcher and studying one's own teaching practice. There is, however, enough of a difference to warrant a separate category for comparison. The previous category examined the role of the researcher. This category looks at the "object" of research. All the students who had a classroom focus studied their own teaching practice: questioning strategies, writing rubrics, math lessons, homework assignments, and so forth. This focus is reflected in the following section, where eight of the ten students say they had learned lessons about their teaching. Even interns who overtly said they were analyzing "students," were really studying the interactions, or the implications for their own practice. Vanessa, for instance. . . . Sandra. . . .

But those students who linked their AR most directly to the SIP (using the school as the unit of analysis) were least able to study their own practice. Inadvertently, a school focus for action research projects took students away from studying their own practice. Those who were engaged in studying school-wide initiatives studied themselves the least. Research projects were constructed as "either/or": either you study yourself or you study a schoolwide program. The mere

fact that students were collecting school-wide data seemed to make it difficult for them to study their own teaching, their implementation of programs. Lana and George's Character Education project came closest to a study of their own practice. However, Lana and George primarily studied their process of developing the curriculum, not the way in which they implemented the curriculum. In other words, they were studying themselves as curriculum developers, not as teachers.

Lessons Learned

Guidelines for the written report of AR projects included a closing section of reflections on lessons learned. Among the questions I wrote for students to use as a check on the thoroughness of their papers were: Have I reflected on what I've learned? Explained how this information can help with school improvement teaching decisions? Help with school improvement efforts? Explain how I have changed as a knower, teacher, researcher? My analysis of this section of their papers produced five categories: teaching, research, students, effective schools or programs, and professional community.

The two most dominant categories were research, mentioned in 79% of the papers, and teaching, mentioned in 64%. Under *research* lessons, I included the following types of statements; how complex and multi-dimensional the concept of "attitude" is as a research construct; how to interview first graders; the benefits of stepping back and looking at my own classroom and students and analyzing what is happening around them; how to collect, make sense of, categorize, and quantify seemingly unclassifiable data from open-ended questions; and that belief in an instructional program is not always confirmed by statistical analysis. Many of the *teaching* lessons were closely related to the topic of the research. Examples of such statements were: how to help the disengaged student; I'm more aware of what I need to do to assist in the development of self-regulated student learning; how to facilitate writing improvement; and how to ask better questions. Also mentioned in this category were "general" lessons about teaching: the benefit of AR in providing data, exploring individual needs, and improving teaching ability; my focus changed from what I can do to improve students to what I can do to improve myself; I'm more confident about

my abilities as a future teacher because I have been trained to see and reflect on the need for change in my own classroom.

Mentioned in far fewer papers were lessons about students (29%); lessons about effective schools or programs (29%); and lessons about participating in a professional community (21%). Examples of comments about *students* are: the problem wasn't how to get students to listen better, but how to get them interested and engaged; I learned much more about individual students and how to closely observe them; I learned about what children are like as writers. Lessons learned about *effective school/program* comments were: the importance of school-wide consistency and data-bases; and thinking about how the school environment might impact student attitudes and behavior. I classified comments under *professional community* when the intern referred to the importance of collaboration. Examples are: the importance of including teacher, student and parent voices; curriculum implementation must be carried out cooperatively; and the importance of collective teacher action and empowerment.

The key finding here, however, is not that more papers included lessons about teaching and research than they did about students, effective schools/programs, or professional community. When I disaggregated the types of learning mentioned in the school-level papers from those mentioned in the classroom-level papers, I again found a striking dichotomy (See Table III). The only category of learning in which there was not a marked differentiation between the classroom and school-level papers was research (80% and 75% respectively).

Table III: Types of Learning

	All AR Papers		Classroom Level AR		School-Level AR	
Teaching	9/14	64%	9/10	90%		
Research	11/14	79%	8/10	80%	3/4	75%
Students	4/14	29%	4/10	40%		
Effective Schools/Programs	4/14	29%	2/10	20%	2/4	50%
Professional Community	3/14	29%			3/4	75%

In sharp contrast were the other four categories. Compared to half of the school-level papers, only 20% of the classroom-level papers mentioned learning about effective schools and programs. None of the ten classroom-level papers mentioned learning lessons about professional community. Conversely, none of the school-level papers mentioned learning about students or teaching. While I did not expect all students to necessarily learn (or mention) the same types of lessons in their papers, neither did I expect to see such a stark difference. I was particularly surprised that none of the school-level papers mentioned learning about teaching or students. What I believe this points to is not the impossibility of learning about professional community if interns study their own classroom, or the impossibility of learning more about students or teaching through a school-level AR, but rather the abiding gap between professional development and school improvement.

Summary

My original view of the connections among action research, professional development, and schools improvement was that AR functioned as a form of professional development which is needed for school improvement. But what happened in the class, as indicated by this analysis, is that the students constructed their action research projects *either* as a personal mode of professional development *or* as a means of assessing school improvement efforts. Student difficulties in connecting AR to PD *and* SI was evident in at least three aspects of their work.

First, they (and I) exhibited confusion over the definition of action research. Need it be collaborative? If so, why were they working alone? What was the object of change: students, themselves, the school? Second, where students focused their attention differentiated the group on four key variables. Those who chose their own classroom as the unit of analysis established an "insider" research perspective and focused on their own teaching practice, but could only connect to school improvement plans at the most general "mission" level and did not develop collaborative projects. Those who studied the school as a unit of analysis had direct connections to school improvement plans and worked collaboratively with others in the school, but did not study their

own teaching and adopted more of a traditional "outside" research stance. Third, those who studied their own practice learned lessons about students and teaching; those who studied school-wide initiatives learned lessons about professional community and effective programs, but not about their students or themselves as teachers.

Contexts for Constructing Action Research

Seeing the either/or constructions that the interns were making peaked my curiosity. It caused me to look more closely at the way I had constructed the course, at the text we used, and at the organizational contexts in which students worked. I was curious to see if the relationship between action research as a form of professional development and school improvement was constructed in ways that basically supported or undermined a symbiotic relationship. Although each context showed a concerted effort to bring teacher development and school improvement into closer union, the fault line I discovered in student constructions was easily traced through each of their learning contexts: the course, the text, and the schools in which they worked.

Pedagogical Construction

The fact that I consciously had to re-do assignments and add new ones should have been an immediate signal that teacher development and school improvement are not all of one piece. The link must be deliberately constructed. Teacher development needs and interests might not directly coincide with school improvement plans or school improvement plans might not take teacher development into consideration. School improvement can be treated as something that occurs without any corresponding need for teacher learning.

My own problems with linking action research to school improvement surfaced even before the course began. In preparing to revise the course, I reviewed two types of materials: books or articles that could serve as guiding texts and the school improvement plans the interns had sent me. My hope was to create a new framework for the course, one that used school improvement plans as a point of departure for action research projects and was informed by scholarship that explicitly linked action research, professional development, and school improvement. The textbook I had

been using, A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research (Hopkins, 1993), devoted one chapter , toward the end of the book, to school improvement. Most of the book, as signalled by the title, focused on *a* teacher (singular) working within the confines of her classroom (rather than in the context of a collaborative school culture). I felt confident that I could find a more integrative text. I was wrong.

Two books, in particular, held promise as replacements for or supplements to the Hopkins text. But on closer inspection, I could not figure out how they could help me accomplish my course goals. The first was Bullough and Gitlin's (1995) Becoming a Student of Teaching. The subtitle of that book, "Methodologies for Exploring Self and School Context," as well as my knowledge of the authors' related writings, motivated me to check the book out of the library. As promised by the subtitle, the book covers multiple methodologies for the study of teaching: life history and educational autobiography, personal teaching metaphors, school histories, action research, ethnography, curriculum analysis, personal teaching text, and educative research. The book would be a powerful and provocative guide to rethinking the purpose, structure and content of an entire teacher education program. Within the range of methodologies, self and context receive ample scrutiny. However, only one brief chapter is devoted to action research and I was looking for a text in which AR was the sole (or primary) focus and which brought together an exploration of self and context within a single research project.

Hoping to find such a model, I turned to Anderson, Herr and Nihlen's (1994) Studying Your Own School. Unlike the previous text, this one did meet my criterion of centering teacher (or practitioner) research within the context of the school (not merely the classroom). But I quickly realized that the book was written for experienced teachers. Advanced graduate students in a qualitative research methodology course would be well served by its treatment of epistemological, political and historical issues. Teacher candidates, I feared, would be overwhelmed.

I had similar difficulties in reframing the course around school improvement plans. My intent was to use these plans to help students link action research projects to school improvement

initiatives that were already underway. I began by summarizing the key points in each of the thirteen plans, so I would be prepared to help each student make connections. But after spending an inordinate amount of time on the first plan, I quickly perused several other plans and discovered strong similarities among them. They tended to be framed within the four broad district goals, with additional goals related to pupil services, special education, and/or gifted and talented programs. By constructing a grid to compare what schools were doing about these goals, I could see that the primary focus of the plans, by far, was raising student math and reading scores on district and state assessments. Some also had objectives for increasing student attendance, community and parental involvement, and teacher participation in staff development.

After filling out this grid for four of the schools, I stopped and wrote up a series of questions from this preliminary analysis: What is the decision-making process for chosen interventions such as individualizing, grouping, targeting particular skills, using reading buddies, having a reading week? How does the SIT go from the broad goal to the objective? How are targeted increases in pass rates on standardized tests determined? Do the schools disaggregate data so they can see how well sub-populations are doing in particular content or skill areas? What is the relationship between staff development opportunities and school improvement objectives? Although every school specified some staff development either within the plan itself or on an attached sheet, my observations were that this was not "systematic, thorough, or based on a needs assessment" and that schools had "too many goals." Fearing that using these plans to frame the course would become a critique of SIPs rather than a model and framework for AR projects, I decided to use the SIPs as opportunities arose, rather than as the organizational frame.

Having failed to find more relevant text materials and to reconceptualize the course around SIPs, my default course of action was to make the types of course modifications described under program context. These modifications did give students the opportunity to learn more about the history and content of SIPs, the functions of SITs, what kinds of data the school collected, and ways in which teachers and support personnel collaborated on SI initiatives. But at times they

inadvertently reproduced the very split between AR as a mode of professional development and AR as a mechanism for school improvement that I was attempting to overcome.

One example of inadvertently reproducing this division occurred during the first official class meeting. I had constructed a questionnaire that asked the interns to reflect on ways in which "You as a teacher, your classroom, and the school environment all make a difference in the lives and learning possibilities for your students. Throughout the semester, we will look at the inter-relationships of these three influences on students. This relational analysis should help you improve teaching and formulate your action research project." I told them that my research question was whether focusing on these relationships would help their development as teachers--their ability to engage in productive change efforts at these three levels. During individual writing time they focused on the strengths and weaknesses of each type of influence and then met in small groups to share their ideas. When we returned for whole group discussion, I asked them to listen for similarities across the three influences as well as for action research ideas.

For "Self," students mentioned the importance of having time and opportunities to observe other classrooms, attend meaningful inservice, read research, try out new ideas and strategies, plan as a team, and receive mentoring. They believed they had learned a lot about establishing routines, simultaneously managing the class and the curriculum, and learning to adapt lesson plans to different students and learning needs. Topics mentioned as positive influences on students at the classroom level included integrated units, time management, varying the basis for grouping students for instruction, and encouraging independent problem solving. They also discussed the importance of long term planning and being overwhelmed by information--curriculum guides and resource materials--saying that these needed to be weeded out and better organized. At the "School" level, topics mentioned were departmentalization, lowering the student/teacher ratio, parent involvement, safety, student empowerment, values, coordinating objectives between grade levels, and block scheduling. Much of the discussion focused on one school's plan to set aside 1 1/2 hour for reading in the morning and using resource as well as classroom teachers during that time to

provide intensive reading instruction to groups of 15 students.

We ended the discussion by searching for similarities across these three influences on student learning. The interns found two: (a) that specialization/ departmentalization was a school-level variation on grouping at the classroom level and (b) that mentoring and time to learn should be important parts of SIPs for all teachers, not just for them, as beginning teachers. We discussed the fact that school improvement plans often target raising reading scores, but less often attend to what teachers need to learn to accomplish that goal. I believe these were useful lessons related to the overall purpose of the activity, however, in my retrospective analysis I wrote: "I think I failed to continue this 'relational' analysis throughout the course and materials I created for the course. I didn't draw specific linkages in this discussion. The activity, in fact, encourages them to think of these influences [teacher, classroom, school] as separate categories." (/ /98)

During the third class meeting, a similar unintended lesson about the difficulty of linking personal action research and school improvement occurred. I had invited one of the coaches, Ms. Upton, to speak to the class about her own action research. I had met her during my meeting with cooperating teachers the previous fall. When the meeting was over, Ms. Upton introduced herself and informed me that she regularly engaged in action research and had spent time in England studying in teacher groups that were influenced by Lawrence Stenhouse. Thrilled to have an experienced teacher within the school system who valued and used action research to inform and improve her practice, I invited Ms. Upton to speak to the class. While the interchange provided a "living model" that some classroom teachers valued conducting action research--even when it wasn't required--no connections were made to school improvement. In fact, the discussion and responses to questions made it apparent that this was not an activity in which Ms. Upton had been able, over the years, to interest her colleagues. Although she had been involved in a teacher research group in England, she had difficulty finding a such a group to join in the states. For her, classroom research was a natural outgrowth of her own curiosity, anthropology background, and desire to keep school administrators at bay (e.g. she had "data" to support her teaching approach).

It was not a mechanism for broader school reform.

This kind of unintentional lesson about the difficulty of connecting a personal action research project to school improvement initiatives kept occurring throughout the course. For example, although I had constructed an entire class period around Noffke's (1997) conceptualization of the personal, professional and political purposes of AR and built this framework into subsequent written assignments, there was no indication that the purposes became a dominant schemata in interns' thinking. Students frequently disregarded these categories even when I gave explicit directions to use them in analyzing their own or other students' projects.

Wanting the students to be more knowledgeable about school improvement efforts, I also gave an assignment, asking them to find what they could about both SI plans and teams. They submitted short papers summarizing the history of school improvement plans (SIP) in their school and school district, how the current plan was written, the composition of the school improvement team (SIT), and the framework/contents of the plan. There was considerable variation in their reports of school improvement processes and their perspectives on these processes. While all schools were required to involve a broad-based team in developing the plan, SITs had varying frequencies of meetings, varying degrees of including staff and parents, and varying levels of sophistication in using a plan for school improvement purposes. At one end of the continuum was the report of a SIT that carefully reviewed standardized test scores to determine what kind of PD would be most beneficial to teachers. More frequently, however, information from these papers, as well as follow-up discussions in class, indicated that schools made decisions about improvement initiatives or staff development that were only tangentially related to school goals and relevant data. Toni's comment captures a theme that surfaced throughout the course:

> the focus changed from year to year for no apparent reason except that test scores weren't showing marked improvement. To my mind, and I asked this question repeatedly, I could not see that there was any plan of action to find out what we were doing at [the school] that worked and what we were doing that didn't.

Although students shared Toni's dismay at the lack of data-based decision making, this assignment left most of them without a sound collaborative model to which they could link their own research.

Because of the dearth of data gathering and analysis in official SIPs, and because of the importance I was placing on this aspect of AR, I developed another assignment that asked students to search for more information about data that were (or could be) collected for school improvement purposes. In addition to thinking about types of data and data collection techniques (such as observations, field notes, audio/videotapes, questionnaires, interviews, documents) for their own research questions, I asked them to consider the following questions: "Does or has your school used any of these forms of data collection for its school improvement plan or initiatives? Can you think of any types of data that would be helpful for the school (or a group within the school) to collect? For what purpose? How?"

In written summaries and class discussions, students mentioned a wide assortment of data gathering techniques that were being used or could be helpful in their schools such as sample test assessments, visits to other schools, attendance/participation rates, and homework assignment books. In addition to wanting to help students be more aware of the possibilities for school-wide use of data, I also wanted to point out similarities in the use of data for action research and school improvement. So, to guide class discussion, I created a six-cell chart to compare how observational, interview and artifact data could be used at the teacher and school levels. In retrospect, I realize that the class as a whole gave minimal attention to (a) student work products (apart from standardized test scores) and (b) ways in which data were not merely collected, but actually used for decision-making. I somehow overlooked an opportunity to help students more critically analyze missing aspects of data collection and use.

The difficulty I was having in helping students connect action research, professional development and school improvement was driven home in the final in-class activity at the end of the semester. The first part of the activity asked them to think about different types of professional development and characteristics of good PD. Their list of PD activities did not include anything

resembling action research. Nor did their characteristics of good PD include a connection to school improvement. Instead, even as teacher interns, professional development was already, for them, what Little (1992) describes as a service delivery model: formal conferences, lectures and workshops. As characteristics of good PD, the interns stated that the presenter must be credible; the information must be new, useful, practical, inspiring and relevant to the classroom; and follow-up materials and sources should be provided. Only after the read "Building Bridges," the U.S. Department of Education brochure on the mission and principles of PD did they conclude that good professional development should have an improvement effect; be linked to a long-term SIP; be collaborative; and facilitate broader change. This, however, was far from the way in which they initially thought about professional development.

Text Constructions

Struck by my pedagogical dilemmas and failures, as well as by students who said the required text confused their thinking about action research, I took a closer look at the ways in which Hopkins (1993) defined AR and conceptualized its relationship to school improvement. In carefully perusing A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research, I realized that it actually made more references to school improvement than I realized. However, these occurred in isolation from explanations and examples of classroom research. Descriptions of classroom research generally made no reference to broader school connections and, in fact, reinforced the idea that school improvement and classroom research were somehow separate. The author, however, does not seem aware of this disconnect.

On pp. 218-291 of the text, Hopkins (1992) claims that his work is guided by a view that professional development and school improvement are inseparable. Referring to the work of David Hargreaves he states two propositions:

> The first is that *there is little school development without teacher development*. The second is that *there is little teacher development without school development*. The truth of the first proposition is axiomatic. This book and virtually every citation in it is based on that premise. The second proposition is more controversial; but it is at the heart of the difference between this book and the one I wrote eight years ago. Put simply, then I believed that to

> improve schools we needed to improve teachers, to build a community of teacher-researchers. Now I believe that to sustain the ethic of teacher development we need to anchor our work to a whole school context. (Italics in original)

While the first proposition might be axiomatic, many schools (perhaps most) still approach school development efforts as though little attention to teacher development is needed. And while Hopkins may have emphasized the second proposition more in this edition of the book, a close text analysis indicates that the book is still not well anchored to the whole school context.

Perhaps unwittingly, Hopkins signifies the problem in his opening definition of classroom research as "an act undertaken by teachers, to enhance their own or a colleague's teaching, to test the assumptions of educational theory in practice, or as a means of evaluating and implementing whole school priorities" (p.1). Using the seemingly inconsequential conjunction *"or,"* which indicates that the following phrase is an alternate, rather than using the conjunction *"and,"* which indicates connection is, of course, the culprit and undermines his thesis on the following page:

> classroom research has increasingly to be seen within the whole school context. It is no longer sufficient for teachers to do research in their own classrooms, without relating their enquiries to the work of their colleagues and the aims and direction of the school as a whole. We need to strive consciously for a synthesis between teacher research and school development. That is why this book is not just a primer on classroom research techniques, but also attempts to relate teacher research to whole school improvement efforts (pp. 2-3).

But that synthesis proves to be elusive. In spite of these kinds of claims and advance organizers scattered throughout the text, the book (which students find helpful and which I probably will continue to use) primarily renders a portrait of classroom teachers engaged in individual or small group research efforts aimed at instructional improvement. Although Hopkins talks about his own work with teachers on school development plans and the importance of the school's culture in sustaining teacher development, most of the book's examples and research methods are divorced from any link to the school context, goals, or improvement plans.

The five cases of action research in Chapter 2, the two in Chapter 7 and the one case in Chapter 9 depict individual teachers, pairs or triads engaged in efforts to understand children's

thinking of to improve the use of cooperative grouping, the quality of student assignments, think time, questioning, and a race relations unit. In only one of these is there mention of a broader school agenda: a school district has encouraged the use of and provided inservice on cognitive models of teaching. But even in this example, the action research project comes from one teacher analyzing her own practice and recruiting two other teachers to see if there is a connection between extending think time and ability to use cognitive models of teaching. There is no further discussion about sharing with a larger community or a sustained, collaborative effort to improve cognitive models of teaching as a school goal.

Moreover, despite advice to maintain a "classroom exceeding" perspective (p. 59), to "work collaboratively" and make connections to school development plans (p. 64), to use classroom observation "in the process of school development" (p. 76), and so forth, it is not until the end of the book (Chapters 10 and 11) that there is focused attention on staff development and school improvement. By that time, students who are designing and conducting action research projects *as* they read the book (the intent of the book is to be a practical guide) would have their work well underway.

The model given for curriculum analysis and development, for example, which is a whole school multi-stage strategy to identify and fill the gaps between school goals and curriculum, could have been offered early in the book with corresponding data gathering and analyzing techniques built into those chapters. Instead, the five middle chapters of the book, which offer practical guidance on framing questions, observing in classrooms, gathering data and analyzing data are almost exclusively individual classroom focused. Suggested stems for developing a focus (p. 63) such as "I would like to improve. . ., What can I do to change. . ., I am perplexed by. . ., create the image of a teacher struggling alone in her classroom to improve the quality of her teaching. This reinforces two messages that Hopkins wants to avoid: (a) that the individual teacher is responsible for her own development and (b) that this development occurs in isolation from school wide goals. (next page encourages collaborative work & connections to school development plans).

Instead, Hopkins could frame or offer questions more in keeping with his notions of curriculum and gap analysis: What are the schools' goals? What are formal curriculum expectations? What is happening in classrooms? What are students doing? Teachers? What is worthwhile? What is problematic? (From above around these larger ones). He could also take advantage of the one example (p. 127) of a group interview he reproduces to show how the external researchers gave feedback to teachers from the students and how the teachers used this additional information to further their own action research efforts. Instead he merely tells us this was done. But without the actual connections described, the textbook is far less functional in being a guide to teacher research AND school improvement than it could be.

Even within the staff development and school improvement chapters (10 and 11), there is little by way of practical guidance to accomplish the second aim of the book, "linking these research efforts to whole school developments" (p. xiii). The section on "Collaborative Action," for example, suggests that short in-service courses, informal networks, and involving students are ways to sustain collaborative action. Yet none of these needs to involve a group of teachers working together in the same school on the same goal, a principle that has been identified in much of the current research and policy recommendations about effective professional development (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Similarly, while the chapter called Classroom Research and School Improvement reviews four types of school improvement initiatives (school self-evaluation, curriculum evaluation, teacher appraisal, and school development planning), most of the links to classroom research provide inadequate guidance for even experienced teachers who might want to forge a closer relationship between the two in their school.

For instance, although Hopkins describes school self-evaluation and teacher research as two sides of the same coin with a "common set of procedures" he does not elaborate on the procedures beyond "a self-conscious and systematic attempt to review what they (both as individuals and organizations) are doing and to proceed to action based on that analysis" (p. 189). Moreover, no explanation is given of where classroom research fits into the five stage Guidelines

for Review and Internal Development in Schools (GRIDS) evaluation plan cycle that is offered as an illustration. It is only in a later section of the chapter that a one paragraph description is given of teachers who used GRIDS as an opportunity to talk collectively, create a coherent focus for development work and analyze their practice. There is one other, brief example of high school science teachers who took advantage of the teacher appraisal mandate to collectively judge the quality of their teaching and "plan further collaborative enquiry on the teaching strategies and schemes of work" (p. 212).

Rather than leave these types of examples to the end of the book, Hopkins might have used more and more elaborated examples which make the connection explicit. Re-constructing this edition of the book (or the next) around the propositions that school development needs teacher development and teacher development needs school development might provide a more powerfully coherent organization that consistently guided readers new to the classroom research process to both understand and be able to use classroom research in relation to school evaluation and planning, curriculum development and evaluation, and teacher evaluation systems.

Hopkins is right when he says that "what are needed are powerful and integrative implementation strategies that directly address the nature of teaching and the culture of the school," that "it is through linking more precise specifications of teaching to classroom research strategies within the content of the development plan that progress is made," and that "strategies for school improvement that do not link teaching to whole school activities are 'doomed to tinkering'" (p. 220). But if those of us who teach action research, write materials, and work with teachers on linking professional development and school improvement have difficulty in providing the mental models (Senge, 1990) for such work, we need to acknowledge that what we are expecting teachers to accomplish in real classrooms is more difficult than our rhetoric allows.

Organizational Constructions

This last section of the paper describes the policy context in which the interns developed their AR projects. As with my pedagogical constructions and Hopkins text constructions, analysis

of state and school district policies indicate a deliberate effort to link teacher development and school improvement. The state and school district within which this program operates requires (a) every school to develop a school improvement plan with school improvement team oversight and (b) every teacher to develop his or her own professional development plan. The two are supposedly integrated, but as the following analysis indicates, the state and school district found it as hard to integrate teacher development with school improvement as did I, the students, and authors of scholarly texts.

The basic structure of the school improvement plan begins with the school system's vision statement and goals for the success of every student. The four goals are: ensure success for every student, provide an effective instructional program, strengthen productive partnerships for education, and create a positive work environment in a self renewing organization. Schools are also encouraged to develop their own vision statements and are given a framework to develop their plans for the year. The school improvement plan is defined as a "blueprint of the actions and processes needed to produce school improvement" and is meant to answer the question, "How do we get from where we are to where we want to go?" Required components include: needs assessment, goals, objectives, strategies, activities, milestones, evaluation, budget and a management system. The plan is supposed to be team developed, long-term (3-5 years), flexible, continuously reviewed, and achievable. But as I learned early in the semester, SIPs did not play an obvious, visible role in school operations. When they did, they were not well coordinated with plans for teacher learning.

Invisible. The interns indicated from the start that they had little familiarity with either school improvement plans or with the school district goals that guided the plans. At a "pre-course" session I held with the interns, I had distributed copies of the district's goals. My overall purpose in conducting this session was to give the students a preview of course expectations. Previous cohorts had suggested these meetings in order to de-mystify action research and to encourage interns to begin thinking about a focus for their projects. I decided that brainstorming researchable

topics related to the four goals would be a way of signaling both the importance and possibility of engaging in research projects that were connected to institutional goals as well as their own professional growth needs. Most of the interns indicated that they did not recall having seen the goals before this. If they had seen them, it was not a memorable experience. I was surprised since all the interns had been working in the school system for at least a year, some of them for as long as five years.

There was a similar lack of familiarity with the SIPs. At a subsequent meeting I had with their cooperating teachers, I was given another indication of the difficulty I might have in connecting AR to school improvement plans. When I explained my plans for the course, coaches nodded that this seemed like a reasonable idea, but expressed little interest in the initiative. Few of them were active participants on school improvement teams, or even knew much about their school improvement plan. Having received the coaches' acceptance, if not endorsement, I then asked the interns to send me a copy of their SIPs. Some had difficulty finding the plan, expressed anxiety about asking their principals for it, or wondered if it was a public document.

These perceptions persisted. On the first day of class, I distributed a seven item questionnaire asking about expectations, conceptions of good teaching, action research, and their AR ideas. The last item was "Describe your knowledge about and/or involvement in school improvement plans or efforts." Even though they had all sent me a copy of the school improvement plan, half of them still had little knowledge of the plan or involvement in school improvement efforts. Typical comments from this group were:

> I don't know much and don't think most teachers do; I had a hard time getting a copy and am not sure I gave you the real plan.
>
> We have a plan--as does every school in [the school system]. I don't know how it was developed, and don't know if it's of benefit or merely a BoE requirement

The other half of the class had somewhat more knowledge, saying that the plan related to academic performance in subject areas and increasing parental involvement, indicating past or current team

membership, or expressing an interest in helping the school meet its goals. While the statements indicated more knowledge or involvement, they did not differ substantially from those above:

> A SIP team meets before of after school. My cooperating teacher is on it.
>
> [I know v]ery little, but I've read the plan each of the past four years and was on the SIT team last year [as a parent representative].

Perhaps not coincidentally, each of the students who selected a school-wide AR project fell into this later category.

Non-connected. These reactions suggest that school improvement plans were not a vital part of school cultures. In addition, they seemed to operate in relative isolation from staff development activities. All of the thirteen schools in which the interns worked included staff development within their school improvement plans either as a separate section or as an activity to accomplish a school improvement objective. However there was little indication that decisions about PD were connected to intervention strategies or that teachers were asked about their learning needs. Numerous interventions and new programs were listed without any related learning opportunities for teachers.

In addition to staff development plans required within SIPs, state policy also requires individualized professional development (IPD) plans throughout the careers of all professionally certified educators. School systems conduct their own approval procedures under state supervision. The goal of the IPDs is to meet the needs of both individuals and local school systems. Approved options include courses developed by school systems, educational projects, action research, mentoring, supervision, peer coaching, educational travel, professional conference attendance or presentation, publications, curriculum development, and participation in the National Professional Standards Board process. Guidelines call professional development an "integral part" of the state's plan "to improve teaching and learning in schools" and require updating in both content knowledge and the teaching-learning process. Plans must include two performance outcomes: what the educator will know or be able to do as a result of the experience

and how those outcomes will impact student learning However, there is no necessary link to school improvement plans or sustained, collaborative activity.

Although there are notable exceptions (Elmore, 1997; Goldberg & Sullivan, 1994), professional development is often conceptualized and implemented without any relation to school improvement and school improvement efforts often occur without attending to teachers' needs for new knowledge, skills and beliefs. In systems that require professional development plans, there is often no requirement (or a mere token requirement) that plans are collaborative or linked to school improvement efforts. Despite new organizational models (Rowan, 1990), schools still function as loosely coupled systems. What happens at the individual and institutional levels bear little on one another. For professional development approval, teachers merely write out what conference they are attending or what curriculum project they are undertaking. Similarly, when school improvement plans are written, little attention is paid to the adequacy of teacher knowledge. An unspoken assumption is that teachers can change practice, use new materials, or understand new approaches to teaching and learning on their own.

Conclusion

While it is tempting to dismiss this analysis as a case of pedagogy gone awry or as unrealistic expectations for a preservice cohort, I have attempted to show that the causes are more systemic. Despite the alluring rhetoric of interdependence, integrated conceptions of professional development and school improvement as well as the structures that support them are still in their infancy. We have few models of what a symbiotic relationship looks like. Until we create these models, efforts to link action research, professional development, and school improvement will be frustrated.

This is not to say that these students' action research projects were of no value. "Lessons learned," course evaluations, written products, and oral presentations indicate that was not the case. But the value was rarely for *both* the individual and the institution. Either students learned more about their pedagogical relationships with students and developed the reflective stance of an

"inside" researcher. Or they adopted the stance of a traditional outside researcher hired to evaluate a school program. Unless we develop more integrated models, those who study classroom phenomenon are likely to remain cut off from collaborative, systemic efforts and professional community; those who study school-wide initiatives are likely to ignore reflective practice. Attempts such as mine to use action research as a form of professional development that is linked to school-wide efforts can inadvertently and ironically detract attention from quality teaching, reproducing the traditional dichotomy between teaching and research.

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